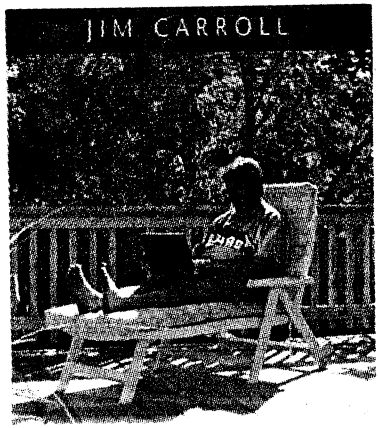
5AM, western red cedar, and Ethernets

• • By JIM CARROLL • •

I'm typing this at 5:07 AM. I'm out on my new deck on a beautiful clear June morning, having just plugged my laptop into the network jack.

I think I'm the only guy in the neighbourhood with an outdoor deck that sports western red cedar, a barbecue, several lounge chairs, an assortment of planters and flowers, as well as a 10-base-T Ethernet connection and a variety of phone jacks.



I will admit that I kind of confounded my contractor a few weeks back, whom we had hired to help put in the deck posts and frame. He reacted with surprise when I started stringing some blue wire through the base of the newly completed frame. "What are you doing," he asked, curious. "Oh, I'm just extending my LAN to the deck."

Last year, when we added an addition to the house to build a "proper home office," I put in place a local area network that extends to almost every room. After all, with both my wife and I working at home—she for three years, myself for six—things were starting to get a little crowded. My thinking with the LAN was that I should be able to work anywhere—as a writer, I want to get out of the office sometimes and work somewhere a little bit more inspiring.

It was surprisingly inexpensive to put the LAN in place—a few hundred dollars for network cabling (category 5—my dream one day is to have a 100 Mbps LAN), and the same for an eight-port network hub.

The centre of it all is the home office. It sports some six network connections so that we can plug in a variety of different equipment in various configurations. Each of our desks also has access to three phone lines (one business, one the personal home line, and one for a modem). I've prewired the room with a coax cable connection to each desk—making the room ready for a Wave cable-modem connection, which is imminent.

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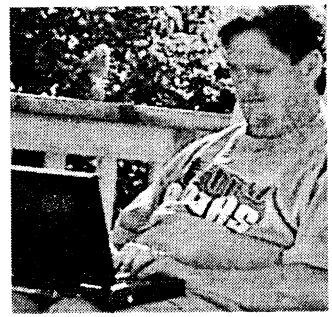
All of the new rooms throughout the house sport a four-jack phone plate on the wall, which allows easy connection to the phone lines and LAN. This means that it is very easy to pick up the laptop, walk to another room, and link into the network and surf the Web—something I need to do a lot of when working on a new book.

The network itself? At this point, a simple Windows 95 peer-to-peer network. And with a wonderful program called PCMaclan, my Apple Macintosh Powerbook is also part of the LAN.



Finding the real world

If the traditional media were to describe what I've done here, they would probably tell the world that I'm a cyberdweeb loser geek who doesn't have a life—and that I have become so wrapped up in computer technology that I don't live in the real world anymore. Nothing could be further from the truth—out here on the deck, the birds are singing, the trees and flowers are blooming, the pool heater is running—and I'm having a ball. The simple fact of the matter is that I use technology as a wonderful tool that helps me to have a great lifestyle.

It is a capability that I sincerely believe in. In my newest, solo book, *Surviving the Information Age*, I set out to help motivate people to adapt to the technological change occurring all around them. One of the key points I make? I explain that, soon, where people will work from won't matter, and that many people will begin to make career decisions based on lifestyle opportunities.

I've certainly done both of these things. As I watch the number of people heading to work right now, I realize that while those folks waste precious time commuting, I'm managing to get lots of work done. Later on, when the day is half over at 10 AM, I'll go jump in the pool to rejuvenate myself, and head back to the home office a few steps away.

Now there's a thought! What I really need is a waterproof laptop with an Ethernet connection!

Jim Carroll is the co-author of the national bestseller *The Canadian Internet Handbook* and 13 other books about the Internet. His newest book, *Surviving the Information Age*, released in April 1997, is designed for baby boomers and others challenged by the emerging wired world—and offers some motivational guidance to help them cope. He can be reached on the Internet at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com, and has an online site containing many other articles concerning the Internet on the World Wide Web at http://www.jimcarroll.com/ He welcomes your comments. ◆